



Depiction of Social and Moral Issues in the Plays of Arthur Miller

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Abstract

It is the need of time to explore the social and the moral responsibility of human being in modern time. Everyone is losing his dignity and self. Miller's plays primarily deal with the hero who is constantly in the conflict of achieving his dignity. Actually Miller is Anti-Aristotelian in his 'concept of tragedy' because his heroes were nowhere associated with the dignity of life. They are not at all a paragon of virtues but on the other hand man with a full vices. Miller is a subtle observer of the society and pointed out the most burning topics in the society in order to reform.

Key words: ape, pathology, sensationalism, puritanism, predicament.

The emergency of the World War II indicate a growing dissatisfaction of playwright and the public also. Many memorable playwrights had disappeared from the American theater. During this situation a very few dramatists stamped their name on the firmament of American theatre. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller carried their name on the American scene. They received much success by giving their influential works. The situation of postwar drama was paradoxical. It was almost challenging period for literary creation. However, Arthur Miller has made a distinguished record.

The post war drama acquired new dignity and new import with the new name Arthur Miller. His insistence on man's inherited will to survive, on the unity of human ties and the perpetual wonder of experience, lifted his work from ideology and sensationalism alike.

"I am tired of seeing man as merely a bundle of nerves. That way lies pathology".

The statement points to Miller's central conviction that as man is seldom defined by his social or political milieu, neither can be escape the impersonal forces which affect his image of himself, his very name. This conflict of image it may seem in particular plays. It energized his powerful character, and driven them to implicate their dreams in a widening circle of loyalties. Miller creates his characters firmly within a family structure. The guilty passion of the hero finally transcends both private will and social sanction. This is the essential dramatic situation in all of Miller's plays.

The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944) depicts a character who anticipates his doom simply because he has come to accept the value which the community has put on his success. All My Sons (1947), a more convincing play which uses war profiteering as it's background, show that not even family background, an Island into itself. *The Death of a Salesman* (1949) reveals the moral ambivalence and inexplicable impact of a major work of art; and

though critics may feel that the voice of tragedy was muffled by pathos in it. In *The Crucible* (1953), written when anticommunist hysteria was at its peak in the country. Miller sets his action in witch-hunting Salem, and once again, though perhaps less reasonably, displayed the clash between private and collective guilt.

Miller's most forceful play, *A View from the Bridge* (1955) focuses on the common moral lust of a man and lust of society which denies men the hope of self betterment. *A Memory of Two Mondays* (1955) is a one act play. In the original version, much of it was in verse, and it appeared on the same bill. Later the play was expanded and heightened in realism. Miller had set himself to be an essayist, commentator and a moralist. While observing an early rehearsal of *Death of a Salesman*, he had written

"We must be terribly lonely people cut off from each other such a massive pretense of self-sufficiency, machined down so fine we hardly touch anymore. We are trying to save ourselves separately and that is immoral, that is the corrosive among us". He repeatedly demanded of the writer "a kind of truthfulness that is large than the mere imitation of life".

Miller denies his own precepts and gives ammunition to his dictators in *After the Fall* (1964). We find him isolating himself with one blow, himself from the purists and the Marxists. A central theme of Miller's earlier works for a world in which it will be possible to lay blame. But now he writes of Quentin:

"His desperation is too serious, too deadly to permit him to blame others."

In his earlier plays, women were submissive like Linda Loman or frigid like Elizabeth Proctor. Sensual pleasures alarm Miller with their overtones of innocence and guilt. Harold Clurman has indicated that an "unmistakable feature of Miller's work is its Puritanism".

Miller deals with men who do not want to work for wages and who live removed from the organized economic and social structural in a

screenplay. *The Misfits* (1961). Loneliness has always plugged the artist. The artist chooses to reveal the truth about his beloved while Eugene O'Neill was such a tormented lover, Arthur Miller was fascinated by the theme that whosoever stands alone is the strongest. He rearranged Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* to emphasize Stockman's ostracism as a result of his dedication to progress.

The isolation of the truthful artist is a necessary supplement of his task. He invited alienation once he sets himself apart as the professional visionary. Loneliness is tolerable when the artistic achievement that it nourishes brings other people together. Miller regards the theater as the means of making men less alone. In his earlier plays he succeeded. In *After the Fall*, his protagonist stands at the crossroads.

The distinction between two major dramatist made similarity and contrast in some respects. The contrast between Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller is complete in almost every respect. Miller, despite his occasional use of flashback technique. He is technically a conservative but basically, he is a realist with a moral, social vision. Tennessee Williams, on the other hand, its deceptive very verisimilitude dwells from untold desires, he is basically a fantastic with a lonely, poetic vision and his dramaturgy. What makes the drama of Tennessee Williams enormously exciting is a precisely its explosive contact with the human unconscious, its enactments of primal conflicts whose significance ultimately lies beyond the scope of reason or social order. It does not mean that his work lacks social values. It stands as the one of the most savage indictment of cultural in our time.

The most obvious quality of Williams drama is its lurid action, it is shocking treatment of murder, perversion, cannibalism, or rape. Williams is a really a moral symbolist projecting the tradition of Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Faulkner into the present. More than any of these writers, he makes mystery of sexuality his central metaphor. The perversion of sexuality reflects the identity of his characters. The absence of love defines the terror of their isolation. Williams apprehension of love is ultimately religious is suggested by his unformed, yet recurrent,

intuitions of it both as a function of evil – Suddenly Last Summer (1958) and as atonement for evil – Orpheus Descending (1955).

According to Miller, the dramatist must not think of man as a private entity and his social relation as something thrown at him, but rather he must see that:

“society is inside of man and man is inside of society and you cannot even create a truthfully drawn psychological entity on the stage until, you understand his social relation a their power to make him what he is to prevent him from being what he is not.”

In *Tragedy and the Common Man*, Miller formulates the concept of tragedy. The tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure his sense of personal dignity.

Being a serious artist, Miller has shown interest in the fundamental issues of contemporary life which emerge essentially from the unchanged human nature. Of these, the condition called guilt and morality is perhaps the most intriguing for a dramatic purpose. The state of guilt provides to the dramatist a built in tension and duality in the scheme of things which enlightens his views on the psychological, moral and mythical aspects of life. It is thus that Miller has focused attention, on more than any other aspect of life, the subject of human morality. In this connection Miller says in The Introduction of Collected Plays -

“I regard the Theatre as a serious business, one that makes or should make man more human, which is to say, less alone.”

In *All My Sons* (1947), Miller depicted the social issue. The real tragedy of the play lies in the character of Chris Keller, who develops an inner conflict between the affection and loyalty he had for his father and his concept of justice and universal brotherhood which the father offended. Miller wanted that his hero should be a man of struggles against “seemingly stable cosmos” to secure his rights, to prevent his dignity. Many of his plays chiefly rest on social and moral consciousness.

Despite the consciousness, Millers literary career is like a coconut without water. He was very alert and serious artist but depression makes him very conscious in his own life and also in his literary works. Dennis Welland is on the whole right when he suggests Millers growing up during the depression in America as the most important factor determining his work.

The position of Miller is immeasurable in the contribution of American theater. He injected new vigor and life to the modern American drama. His excellent plot construction with its base in realism. His skillful use of symbolism, and most important of all, his preoccupation with social ideas and themes have made Miller one of the few great American dramatists who have enjoyed name and fame since the Second World War period.

Whatever the situation, Miller has delineated in his drama, is entirely resembled with the present situation of the contemporary period. In the modern time everyone is just trying to achieve something by hook or crook. There are no moral and ethical values for those. In that sense Miller’s place are the replica of the modern situation. So it is very interesting to explore the moral and social responsibility in Miller’s play because he portrays the realistic situation of human being. Miller is the only playwright who has just reflected the predicament of modern man. So, he becomes well known as the Pillar of American Drama.

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